

I Samuel 3:1-10
9th Sunday after Pentecost
Sermon Series: Bible Stories
The LORD Calls Samuel – Listen to God

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The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.

² One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. ³ The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the LORD, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the LORD called Samuel.

Samuel answered, "Here I am." ⁵ And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down.

⁶ Again the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

"My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down."

⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

⁸ A third time the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰ The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Grace and peace to you from our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. That's the opening line of our text this morning. How this boy named Samuel had come to be in such a position is an amazing story. Samuel's mother, Hannah, was a faithful Israelite woman. But she was barren. Year after year she came with her family to the tabernacle. She would weep and pray for the gift of a son. She even made a solemn vow: **LORD Almighty, if You will only look on Your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget Your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life** (I Samuel 1:11). The Lord heard her prayer and graciously gave her a son. She named him Samuel, which means "heard by God." After she had weaned him, Hannah made good on her vow. She took her little boy, who was probably only three or four years old at the time, to Shiloh and dedicated him for life-long service to the Lord.

It wasn't an easy time to serve in Israel. **In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.** That's a terrifying sentence. There's nothing worse than a famine of the Word of God. Because of Israel's wickedness God had gone silent. But that was about to change. God was about to speak.

It began like this. After a long day of service in the Lord's house, Eli and Samuel were asleep. In the middle of the night a voice called out: "Samuel!" The young boy instinctively ran to his master Eli. "Here I am!" he said, But Eli hadn't spoken. This happened three more times until, finally, Eli realized that the Lord was speaking. So he told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and

if he calls you, say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” Samuel did as he was told. When the Lord came calling a fourth time, Samuel responded in reverent faith: **Speak, for your servant is listening.**

Oh, that those words would be on our lips, that those words would come from our hearts more often than they do! The attitude that is often found in our hearts is shameful. Too often take on the attitude not of humble, thankful servants, but of a spoiled, entitled brats. “Lord, I don’t have time to listen to Your Word. I’m too busy.” “Lord, things in life aren’t going the way I want. I’m done listening to you.” “Lord, your Word is dusty and outdated. You need to get with the times.” Instead of, “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening,” our hearts are often more likely to say, “Hush, Lord! I’m going to do the talking!”

In his book, *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis tells the story of a senior demon named Screwtape who writes letters to his demonic nephew, Wormwood, who’s just breaking into the tempting business. Screwtape gives him all kinds of sage advice on how to bring about man’s damnation. One little tidbit is particularly striking: *It’s funny how mortals always picture us as putting things into their minds: in reality our best work is done by keeping things out.*

How true this is for us! Too often it’s not just that our hearts are filled with sin but that they are sometimes practically empty of God’s Word. God took His Word away from wicked Israel. Our sin-filled hearts and closed ears have earned the same for us—an eternity of separation from God’s Word and God’s grace.

Brothers and sisters, God’s Word is so important precisely because it tells us that we sinners don’t get what we so richly deserve! Jesus said: **Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it** (Luke 11:28). The Word we so often and so thoroughly fail to hear and keep points us to someone never who failed. That Word points us to the perfect Substitute who’s ears were always open to His Father’s Word even as a twelve-year-old boy, a Stand-in who always kept the Sabbath and made it His custom to go to temple and synagogue to hear His Father’s Word, a Savior who was so appalled by the idea of spending eternity without us that He endured our hell for us, a Redeemer so determined to free us from the curse of sin that He took its guilt upon Himself and shed His priceless blood at Calvary to pay for it, an Advocate so resolute to close the door on death and open the gate to heaven that He burst from the tomb on the third day declaring, **Because I live, you also will live** (John 14:19).

In God’s Word—and only in God’s Word—do we find something for faith to cling to and not be disappointed: Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. That’s why we need big ears for listening. That’s why we need to pray with Samuel, “Speak, O Lord!”

Remember how the Lord called to Samuel again and again? Well, in gracious patience, He does the same for us. Again and again He holds out opportunities for us to hear His Word. Weekly worship services where His Word is proclaimed in truth and purity. Confirmation classes, Sunday school lessons, and Bible studies that apply the Word to our lives. Devotions in books and magazines and online. Bibles in numerous translations formatted for study. Catechisms, hymnals, Bible commentaries. We are surrounded by God’s Word! To us, our Savior says, **He who has ears, let him hear** (Matthew 11:15). The only proper response is **Speak, Lord, your servant is listening!**

Salvation isn’t the only reason we need to listen to God’s Word. Service is important too. We not only need big ears for listening; we need big hearts for service. God’s Word gives us both.

Consider Samuel. At the time of our text he was a lowly servant of the high priest. But the Lord was training him to serve as prophet. He served as prophet during some difficult years in Israel. During Samuel's time in office Israel rejected the Lord's leadership in favor of a king. In loving patience God gave them King Saul. That didn't work out so well. So God gave them David, Israel's greatest a king, a hero and **a man after the Lord's own heart** (1 Samuel 13:14). But he was also far from perfect. Who can forget his sin with Bathsheba and his coldblooded murder of her husband?

Through all this, through the reigns of Saul and David, through all the ups and the downs, there was one constant. Samuel was always there guiding these far from perfect kings, declaring God's will for Israel, proclaiming the Lord's saving Word. That didn't happen by accident. Samuel, who was himself a sinner and far from perfect, was not born a prophet. God made him a prophet. God called him, trained him, and through his Word equipped Samuel for service.

He does the same for us. God's Word isn't just about what happens after we die; it's about what we do while we live on this earth. And what are we to do while living on this earth? In his farewell sermon, after reminding the people of their sin and about the God who saves, Samuel said to God's people: **Serve the Lord with all your heart** (1 Samuel 12:20). It's the same for us. Life is all about service. We are to serve the Lord in thanks for His saving love.

We are God's people, chosen by His grace, called to faith and to salvation. He expects a lot of us. To husbands he says, **Love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her**. To wives he says, **Submit to your husbands as to the Lord** (Ephesians 5). Both of those commands go against our selfish, sinful natures. But it's still what God expects.

To parents—and especially to fathers—God says: **Do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord**. And to those children He says, **Obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right** (Ephesians 6:1). Parental love and unquestioning obedience do not come to parents or children naturally.

He tells pastors and teachers to preach and teach His Word faithfully (1 Corinthians 4:2). He tells parishioners and students: **Obey your leaders and submit to their authority** (Hebrews 13:17). But the human heart thinks its way is better than the Lord's.

God's Word has similar instructions for leaders in government, for employers and employees, for young people and old people. To all of us as we heard last week, God says, **Love the Lord your God with all your strength and love your neighbor as yourself** (Luke 10:25). As I said God expects a lot of us. He sets the bar high—a standard that we can't live up to.

So why try? The Apostle Paul gives us a beautiful answer: **I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God** (Romans 12:1). The good news of God's love for the unlovable, God's care for the careless, God's forgiveness of those who don't deserve it—this is what motivates us. God's Word gives us big hearts for service. God's Word strengthens our faith in Jesus, fuels our desire to serve Him and strengthens us to get out there and be the people God has made us to be in Christ: willing servants with open ears and big hearts.

So, together, let's bow our heads and pray: *Speak, Lord, your servants are listening. Grant us faith through Your Word. Give us ears for hearing and hearts for serving, to the glory of Your saving name.*

Amen.